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Someone We Can Fully Trust

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Someone We Can Fully Trust

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SOMEONE WE CAN FULLY TRUST

by C. Mervyn Maxwell



ROBERTS



Millions of people believe that at 10:56:20 p.m. on Sunday, July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong set his foot on the moon.

They are right, of course! Who could doubt it?

Yet it is fascinating to speculate with the possibility that it might have been a dramatic hoax. After all, a "credibility gap" has existed for years between public announcements and the actual truth.

Let's see then. If I asked you why you believe that Armstrong placed his foot on the surface of the moon, what reasons would you give?

No doubt your first would be, "I was watching my TV with intense interest, and I saw him do it with my own eyes!"

To this I could reply that if you were watching your TV, you were not looking at Neil Armstrong. What you were looking at was a piece of slightly curved glass coated with phosphorescent chemicals. As you watched, a single dot formed by a focused stream of electrons moved about rapidly producing a pattern of bright and dark spots

which your mind interpreted to be Neil Armstrong setting his foot on the surface of the moon!

You of course would protest that millions of viewers could not have been wrong and that they all interpreted the picture in the same way. To which I could reply that in 1938 Orson Welles's Mercury Theater reported over the radio that a hostile contingent from Mars had landed on America and was rapidly conquering the country, and that millions of Americans believed this report by the news media to be truth, and yet were dead wrong.

And if you insisted that hearing something and seeing it are two different things, I could reply that as early as 1902 many people watched a flickering movie of a Jules Verne novel showing people landing on the moon and that seeing it happen did not mean that it happened in 1902.

Sooner or later you would say I suppose, "But everything was different this time! On July 20, 1969, we weren't depending only on our eyes. There were many other factors

involved that led us to believe that what we saw was the truth."

At last we would have arrived together at the realization that seeing is not necessary to believing, provided sufficient other evidence exists on which to base our belief. (After all, a family down my street owned a TV set that wasn't in working order on July 20, 1969. They didn't see Armstrong land, but in spite of not seeing him they believe that he landed because of all the other evidence.)

What is some of the evidence that gives us confidence to believe in this particular event?

Our decade of experience with NASA. We learned to trust NASA because it was so honest about its failures as well as its successes. Besides, the moon landing came as a natural climax to all that NASA had done before.

There is President Kennedy's promise to land a man on the moon before 1970.

There are the moon rocks with their unique chemical and physical fingerprints—like "nothing on earth."



If you wish you could be a little more sure about whether Jesus really did rise from the tomb on Easter morning years ago, you will find this article especially helpful.



UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

There are the laser beams that have been reflected back from the mirror left on the moon.

There is the honesty of the astronauts themselves. Their characters, candidly analyzed by the public press, justify our confidence.

There is the fact that both England and Russia monitored the trip on their equipment and would surely have cried "Foul" if they had been unable to spot America's spaceships maneuvering around the moon.

And there is the cumulative evidence supplied by the thousands of individual workmen and scientists who took part in the total project.

All of these things taken together make 1969 entirely different from 1902 and 1938. Whether or not we watched Armstrong on TV makes no difference to our belief. We can rest assured that he did indeed set foot on the surface of the moon, because—even though as individuals we cannot "prove it"—a large body of evidence supports our belief. Certainly it is much more reasonable to conclude that he did than

to attempt to prove that he did not.

And what we have just said about the landing on the moon also applies to the great events in the Bible! As in the case of my neighbors down the street on July 20, 1969, none of us had our TV sets turned on when God created the earth, or when Jesus died on the cross, or when He arose from the dead; yet we can believe these events just the same, on the basis of the available evidence.

Christ's resurrection from the dead, for example, must surely be regarded as one of the most believable events in history, because it is one of the best attested.

Though we did not see Him alive after His death, think of the large number of people who did! Mary Magdalene saw Him first, early that Sunday morning. John 20:17, 18. Other women saw Him a little later. Matthew 28:9. In the late afternoon He walked with a couple to the village of Emmaus a few miles from Jerusalem. Luke 24:13. Early on another day He appeared by Lake Galilee. John 21.

Paul, who at first had no intention of ever believing in the resurrection and eagerly prosecuted the "fanatics" who did, in time found the evidence of Christ's resurrection overwhelming. When asked years later why he had come to believe in it, he replied, Why, the risen Christ "appeared to Cephas, and afterwards to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then He appeared to James, and afterwards to all the apostles." 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, NEB. And "last of all," he added, "as if to one born abnormally late, He appeared to me!" Verse 8, Phillips.

Some people think it is only "faith" that gets a Christian to believe in the resurrection, and they define faith as a fine feeling or as a "leap in the dark." It was neither a fine feeling nor a leap in the dark that persuaded Paul to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. It was the plain and simple fact that hundreds and hundreds of people had seen Him alive since He had



died! And when years later skeptics questioned Paul's credulity, he reminded them that many of these persons were still alive even then. What he meant of course was, If you don't believe me, then go and talk to them!

"Last of all," Paul said, "He appeared to me also." Like the testimony of America's rivals in the space race, Paul's ratification of the resurrection is particularly valuable because it comes not only from an eyewitness but also from one who had been an avowed skeptic.

But there is much more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than the reports of Paul and hundreds of eyewitnesses. For example, just as Kennedy promised the moon landing, so God foretold the resurrection. Speaking about Jesus seven hundred years in advance, Isaiah wrote prophetically: "He was pierced for our transgressions, tortured for our iniquities. . . . He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. . . . He was cut off from the world of living men, stricken to the death for my people's transgression."

But after Christ was slain for our sins, Isaiah saw Him resurrected, triumphantly alive again! "After His disgrace He shall be fully vindicated. . . . Therefore I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He shall share the spoil with the mighty." Isaiah 53, NEB.

Paul was greatly impressed with this type of evidence. He reminded his readers that Jesus rose again "according to the Scriptures," that is, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. See 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. He might have added that Jesus rose again also in fulfillment of His own

promises. Over and over again Jesus warned His followers that He was about to be killed, and then assured them that on the third day afterward He would come to life again. See Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19.

We have said little about the characters of our witnesses. Surely they were as honest as the astronauts. Anyone well acquainted with the life and teachings of Jesus gladly concedes that He was at the very least a good man—and a very wise one, full of good advice. But if Jesus did not rise from the dead, He was neither a good man nor a wise one; He was either an impostor or an idiot!

Think too of all the men and women who surrounded Christ and saw Him alive again. They went out into a world distorted by despair and dishonesty and brought to it a message of hope, integrity, and new life. What they said about the resurrected Christ transformed people. Certainly it transformed themselves! Paul, the cantankerous accuser, became an evangelist of hope and a model of selflessness.

The other men who began the Christian revolution made no attempt to explain away the resurrection. They knew only too well that on the night Jesus was arrested and crucified, Peter, their most vocal spokesman, had denied ever knowing Him, and all of them had fled for their lives in terror. Yet these same men but a few weeks later faced up to the authorities who had killed Christ and bravely declared their faith in Him. Something had happened to change them, and they—who surely knew what it was bet-

ter than we—said it was their being with the risen Christ. Until we can prove them wrong, we must take their word for it.

There have always been those who have said that Jesus lived the life of a good man, and died and stayed dead as any other good man might do, and that the good He has achieved in the world has been effected by His good example rather than by His supernatural resurrection. Thomas Jefferson, for example, the third President of the United States, a man who was proud to consider himself a Christian on condition that Christ be allowed only human virtues, twice went through the Gospels selecting parts he considered genuine and gathering them into a little book, *The Life and Morals of Jesus* (subsequently published by the United States Congress). From his collection Jefferson omitted the virgin birth and all the miracles, and he closed with the account of the stone being rolled across the entrance to Christ's tomb.

In more recent years Hugh Schonfield has argued in his *Passover Plot* that Jesus laid careful plans to appear to die so that He could appear to rise again. At the cross He drank a medicated potion that was intended temporarily to produce the symptoms without the reality of death. The spear thrust by a soldier into His chest cavity was not in His scenario; His death came unexpectedly. He did not rise again, but His disciples, convinced that He would, made up the story that He had.

It is as unbelievable as it is superficial—and as unhistorical.

Most people do not know it to-



PIERCE

day, but to test the theory that Christ's followers made up the account of His resurrection we fortunately possess what scientists call a "control." We actually have the case of a notable teacher and physician whose followers claimed, contrary to actual truth, that he returned to life. The name of this man was Apollonius of Tyana. He was born at approximately the same time Jesus was and passed most of his life in the eastern Mediterranean where Jesus also lived. Around the year 210 Julia Domna, the recently widowed wife of the Roman Emperor Severus, hired one of the most accomplished authors in the empire, Flavius Philostratus, to write up the career of Apollonius, possibly in an attempt to counteract the effect of Christ's Gospels. Philostratus added a number of miracles to his available data, invented a virgin birth, and reported that after his death Apollonius appeared as immortal to some of his immediate followers.

If the consequences of Christ's resurrection on world history are due to a fictional account of it concocted by His disciples, then we should suppose that the biography of Apollonius of Tyana must have had the same world-changing effect. The obvious fact is, of course, that it had almost no effect. It stirred a ripple at the time it was composed, it was quickly forgotten, and today it is entirely unknown except by a few historians and other specialists.

The rise of the Christian church and its impact on world history can no more be explained without the historical event of Christ's resurrection than the transition from republican to imperial Rome can be

explained without the career of Caesar Augustus, or the Reformation of the sixteenth century without Martin Luther, or the Napoleonic era without Napoleon.

What we have been discussing about Christ's resurrection tells us a lot about what God is like. God has not asked us to believe in the resurrection without first providing evidence for it. In fact God never asks us to believe anything without first providing evidence on which to base our faith. To be sure, He does not repeat the event right before our eyes before asking us to believe, any more than NASA carried us all to the moon on July 20, 1969, for individual crater-side views of the moon landing before inviting us to believe that Armstrong set foot on the surface of the moon. But He does furnish sufficient evidence to persuade reasonable men.

This is just what we should expect. The Creator, who made man, made man's mind. And when He communicates with us, He is far from embarrassed to use this most amazing and wonderful organ that He created.

When, as God's unique representative, Jesus attempted to assure His discouraged disciples before the event that He would indeed rise from the dead, He said, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; *or else believe Me for the very works' sake.*" John 14: 11. (Italics supplied.) In other words, look at the evidence of My life and teachings and base your belief on that! After the event, when Thomas doubted that Christ had in fact risen, Jesus extended to him

the quiet invitation, "Reach your finger here; see My hands [with their fresh scars from the crucifixion nails]. Reach your hand here and put it into My side [where the crucifixion spear entered My ribs]. Be unbelieving no longer, but believe." See John 20:37, NEB. Jesus said in other words, "Believe in Me on the basis of this evidence."

What Christ did in these examples is typical of His career and typical of the Bible as a whole.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good," says Psalm 34:8. Be scientific about it! Conduct experiments on your own. "Taste Him." Try Him out for yourself—and on the basis of your own discoveries, draw your own conclusion to have faith in Him.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." Joshua 1:5, RSV. Go back over all you know about God's relationships with that one man. Review the evidence; and then know in your heart what His relationship is going to be with *you*, another man.

"Faith" in a God who deals with us like this is not something intrinsically different from scientific reason. It is not a kind of "blind leap in the dark." Rather Bible "faith" is the next intelligent, sensible, and trusting step taken in the blazing light of convincing evidence.

Thus, even though our television sets were not tuned in on resurrection Sunday and we did not see the event with our eyes even on a TV screen, we believe in the resurrection anyway because of the abundant weight of persuasive evidence. □